

Series I
Correspondence,
1932-1973

Box 4, Folder 18

November 28, 1955 -
December 16, 1955

0255

22 November 1955

Dear John:

I am in receipt of your letter in which you enclosed a letter from Admiral Lonnquest. As you requested, I have replied to Admiral Lonnquest. A copy of this reply is enclosed herewith.

This question of classification of these volumes is a serious one. The Naval War College has 'blown hot and cold', but in the last review of Volume II I was flatly informed that the book could in no way be recommended for reduction to a lower classification than Confidential. I think that it will remain so for the reasons mentioned in my reply to Admiral Lonnquest's letter.

New subject:

I read, with a great deal of interest, Eller's criticism of your chronology book in a recent U.S. Naval Institute Proceeding. It was a very friendly criticism and gives your book a beautiful send-off. I suppose that, in a large way, it is correct, but as I am unable to thoroughly examine the chronology I cannot say whether it is correct or not. You and I both know that there are some very important changes which should be made in your book and I hope that you will make them. What the Naval War College is going to do about this -- or has already done -- I don't know. But I do know that a Captain on the staff was directed to collect some information thereon. If you don't hear anything from the Naval War College, it will be because the War College feels that you have been informed enough through me.

Everyone agrees that you had a wonderful idea in producing this chronology. Our only hope is that it will be reviewed by you and that, in the next volume, you will make the necessary changes. Books of this nature are rarely correct on the first printing.

With best regards and best wishes for the holiday season which is fast approaching, I am, as ever,

Your old friend,

R. W. BATES

RADM John J. Heffernan, USN
Chief of Naval History

0256

7 December 1955

Dear Bill:

I suppose that you will be somewhat surprised to hear from me because I think that this is the first time that I have written to you. However when one has a problem, one, if wise, will seek the best source for the solution to that problem. I have such a problem and you are the best source.

I have a matter to ask you about which is not related with modern affairs, but has to do with the Japanese operations in the Pacific. As you know I am preparing a study of the Battle for Leyte Gulf.

I am now somewhat concerned because I have received some information from Captain Ohmae, ex-IJN, who is attached to the Army Military History Section in Tokyo, wherein, in stating the reasons for separating the FUSO and YAMASHIRO from the other battleships of the FIRST Striking Force, he employed language as follows:

" The FUSO and YAMASHIRO could not steam in the fleet formation at more than twenty knots for protracted periods even though they were capable of top speeds of twenty-two and one-half knots. Their speed limitations were due primarily to the difficulty in firing their boilers which, using a combination of coal and oil, required almost constant stoking when running at extreme speeds. The fact that their crews were not well trained may have been a contributing factor to the difficulty in achieving proper stoking. The NAGATO could achieve and maintain speeds (twenty-four knots) for longer periods due to having more experienced personnel.

"When steaming at high speed the FUSO and YAMASHIRO usually made heavy smoke with the ensuing possibility of detection".

There is considerable question about the above. Some sources agree with Jane, one other denies. Let us examine these sources.

(a) Jane's Fighting Ships 1933 states, "Fuel normal 1000 tons, maximum 4000 tons coal and 1000 tons fuel oil". Jane then goes on to say that in 1932 - 1933 these ships were thoroughly reconstructed and that the 24 MIYABARA boilers were replaced by 8 KANPON. Jane's Fighting Ships 1934 states, "Fuel normal 1000 tons, maximum 5000 tons oil".

0257

7 December 1955

The inference from this is that in 1933 these ships became oil burning.

(b) Rear Admiral Albert Mumma, USN, Chief of the Bureau of Ships stated that he had no source material other than Jane's and felt that he could not help but that COMNAVFE (meaning of course you) might well be able to.

(c) Rear Admiral Carl Espe, USN, Director of ONI stated as follows:

"(1) A post World War II Japanese publication, KOKAN GIJUTSO NO ZENBO (Japanese Warship Construction) listed both the FUSO and YAMASHIRO as being mixed firing. This publication was prepared by 13 former Japanese naval officers in Japan after the war.

"(2) Admiral Nagasawa, Kou, the Chief of the Maritime Staff of the Military Self Defense Force, was in Washington during the time we were researching this item. He was questioned on the subject of the firing arrangement of FUSO and he stated categorically that FUSO and YAMASHIRO were oil fired during World War II.

"(3) Information in Washington on the subject of the FUSO and YAMASHIRO is inconclusive. ONI did not study these ships immediately after the war since they were quite old and had been sunk. Our efforts were directed towards the newer Japanese vessels to determine the state of scientific and technical advances made by the Japanese. My analysts feel that the best sources for information on the firing of FUSO and YAMASHIRO are in Japan and suggest that a letter to Ace Model Company, Tokyo, where a number of former Japanese Bureau of Ships personnel are employed, might bring forth the answer you desire".

(d) Our Japanese language officers here say that in so far as they know - and they have reason to know - all Japanese combatant ships were oil burning at the time of the war.

I would appreciate it if you would have some of your "hearties" solve this problem for me. It is quite important because it affects my analysis considerably.

Until I heard from Captain Ohmae I had never heard of this mixed firing and I have only heard of it now because I challenged the Japanese to give me better reasons for dividing their forces than they had heretofore, as a result of which challenge they produced this coal and oil concept.

0258

7 December 1955

It is hard for me to believe this concept, as, with war planned for a long time, it was essential that all combatant ships be oil burning.

I would naturally appreciate the truth in this matter. However since the Japanese know that we are writing this battle it is important to be cautious in obtaining the information as one of Sam Morison's aides says "they will give you the party line".

I hope all is well with you, and that you are enjoying your assignment which in my mind grows daily more important.

Best wishes for the Christmas season, as ever,

Your old friend,

R. W. BATES

Vice Admiral William M. Callaghan, USN,
Commander, Naval Forces, Far East,
% Fleet Post Office,
San Francisco, California.

0259

14 December 1955

Dear Admiral Price:

In view of your comments the other evening relating to the Battle of Savo Island, I have taken out of the file your action reports for that time, i.e., that is, the WILSON's action reports, of which there are three basic reports and one report by the Executive Officer.

Nowhere in these reports is there any statement relating to the movement of the Japanese force which eventually arrived at Savo Island.

I am mentioning this to you because I have been wondering for some time whence came the original statement that information had been received about noon that day relating to the above Japanese force.

You are not the only officer who has made this comment and I have for some time been endeavoring to track it down.

Our investigation, which supported completely that of Admiral Hepburn, who made the Hepburn report on this battle, said that the message relating to the cruisers, destroyers, seaplane tenders and gunboats, i.e., this was the basic message, was received via American FOX at 1842 and by Australian Bells at 1817 (both of these are local times). The original sighting was made, apparently, at 1025 so that about ten hours between contact report and receipt at Savo Island. Whether the sighting plane made a report at the time of sighting or made the report on return to base, it has been impossible to definitely determine. This is because it was the policy of the Royal Australian Air Forces stationed in the operational areas to destroy their files after one month and, as Admiral Hepburn says, the pilot of the plane could not be identified.

With best regards, and with best wishes to you and Clarice for a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

RADM W.H. Price, USN
ComDesFlotTWO

P. W. BATES

0260

15 December 1955

Dear Captain Odend'hal:

Thank you very much for your kind letter of December 9th. I cannot forward your letter to Admiral Nakayama and I am therefore returning it to you.

I am not writing to Admiral Nakayama because he was here recently and I asked him this very question. He said he could not answer.

I have now written to Admiral Callaghan to see if he can discover the answer.

I have to be very careful in this as I do not wish to lose my friendly contacts with the Army Military History Section, Far East Command, nor my connection with Captain Ohmae.

I hear rumors now of two stories: one is that a group of naval officers in Japan have written a book giving data on all the Japanese ships and classing the FUSO and YAMASHIRO as coal and oil burning; on the other hand, Admiral Nagasawa, Kou, stated categorically to Admiral Espe, the Director of Naval Intelligence, that the ships were completely oil burning.

There is no question in my mind but that they were oil burning because not only were they rebuilt in the early '30's, and this is mentioned in both Jane and Brassie, but in this operation we have as yet found no colliers assigned for the purpose of coaling these two battleships.

What I hoped you would do was to give me the name of some American naval officer in a competent position in Japan to whom I might write. My plan was to advise him of my problem and have him discover the answer in a, shall we say, round-about way.

Since you will be in Japan in January, it may be that you will be able to find the true story yourself. I must request that in doing so that you do nothing to indicate to the Japanese that I questioned the information I am getting from Captain Ohmae. In other words, I have a contact there which I do not wish to destroy, even though much of the data is extremely doubtful.

With best regards, and with best wishes for a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

R. W. BATES

Captain C.J. Odend'hal, USN

0261

15 December 1955

Dear Bowling:

In working on the study of the Battle for Leyte Gulf I have now reached the point, October 21st, 1944, when the PT boats had arrived in Leyte Gulf and had been directed by CTF 77 (Admiral Kinkaid) to commence operations in the southern entrance to San Juanico and Surigao Straits and the northeastern portion of the Mindanao Sea.

I am quite interested in this assignment of forces because I can nowhere discover what the objective of the PT boats was in these locations on this evening. The orders merely say "commence operations". In your order you give, for the PT boats for the whole Leyte operation, in paragraph 2, which is the objective of the whole force, "This task group will support the ground forces in the occupation of Leyte, Philippine Islands by carrying out offensive patrols along the enemy held coast, seeking out and destroying enemy shipping, barge traffic and shore installations. Boats will operate during the initial operations entirely from tenders and floating equipment. When the PT advance base is sufficiently established, boats will operate from the base also."

I see no tasks assigned in your paragraph 3, which is the task paragraph. I find nothing in Admiral Kinkaid's orders which assigns any task to your command either. There is merely an appendix on the subject of the PT boat operations, but nowhere therein does he assign an objective to your command.

My thought in this matter is that, since at this time we were on the second day of the landing and were expecting Japanese Tokyo express runs of minor or major scope, the objective of the PT boats was essentially the prevention of an undetected movement of Japanese forces into Leyte Gulf via San Juanico Strait or Surigao Strait south. I cannot see why such an objective was not assigned to you by Admiral Kinkaid if that objective is correct. I see very little use of the PT boats at this time in the locations assigned by Admiral Kinkaid, i.e., PT operation Areas 91, 100-M, and 101. For your information, you stationed two pairs of PT boats in lower Surigao Strait (Area 100-M), one pair in the Mindanao Sea off the northern tip of Mindanao (Area 91), one pair off

0262

15 December 1955

the west coast of Panaon Island (Area 101) and one pair off the coast of San Juanico.

Since you had 45 PT boats, I am unable to discern why it was that we only put out ~~eight~~ ^{TEN} PT boats on this night and for the following nights, unless your "wear and tear" factors were such as to require three quarters of your PT boats as a general thing in reserve. I feel that it would be correct in my writeup on this day, which, by the way, is not a long writeup (possibly one or so pages), to point out in effect what I have said above, i.e., that it seems surprising that no task was assigned your PT boat command by CTF 77 or by Commander SEVENTH Fleet, and that the correct objective here was the prevention of an undetected approach of the Japanese forces into Leyte Gulf. This would then be similar to the objective given to the Allied submarines off Bungo Suido, i.e., the prevention of the undetected sortie of the Japanese forces from the Inland Sea.

The above, in my mind, was a correct objective for the PT boats and one which they could well accomplish and which, at the time of the major battle four days later, they did accomplish.

New Subject:

I was very sorry to note that last year's selection board failed to recognize you. Your experience in handling many ships in a major war in a most successful manner should have paid off more than it did. You are perhaps beginning to sense the problems which I faced all of the time during the war. Unfortunately, talent or merit very often is sunk in the maelstrom of friendship and local politics.

With best regards, and with best wishes for a very merry Christmas and a very happy New Year, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

R. W. BATES

Captain S.S. Bowling, U.S. Navy
Office of the Secretary of Defense
Room 3B858, Pentagon
Navy Department
Washington 25, D.C.

0263

16 December 1955

Dear Roger:

I received your letter with a great deal of interest and want to thank you very much for your assistance as regards those translations. I felt sure that our translators were right and I choose to persist in believing so.

Secondly, I want to thank you very much for your comments about Mrs. Tanaka's baby; she sent me an announcement recently and I have already written to her about it.

I am quite worried that you have written to Captain Ohmae about this problem concerning the FUSO and YAMASHIRO. I could have written to Captain Ohmae myself about this problem, or to the Army Military History Section (Far East Command), but I chose not to do so because the evidence is against Captain Ohmae.

This is so because:

(1) Japan claimed to be a first class naval power and certainly, if she was expecting war, would have insured that all of her ships were oil-burning; this is particularly so because the Japanese coal was very bad.

(2) There is nothing in the information available to this study which indicates that there were any colliers attached to any of the supply forces; certainly, if a ship is mixed fueling (coal and oil burning), it would require colliers.

(3) Rear Admiral Nagasawa, Kou, told Rear Admiral Espe (Director of Naval Intelligence) categorically that both of these battleships were oil-burning.

(4) Jane's Fighting Ships, 1933, indicates (not in a direct statement but by allowances) the replacement of boilers (reconstruction) in 1932-33, and therefore that these ships would thereafter become oil burners; this view is supported by Brassey, the British publication.

(5) Our Japanese language officers all say that they have never heard at any time of any Japanese ships, at least top combatant ships, which were not oil-burning.

Captain Ohmae appears to have gotten his information from the fact that some naval officers after the war (in Japan) published a book giving the characteristics of

0264

16 December 1955

these ships and classed the FUSO and YAMASHIRO as both coal and oil burning ships. Their statements, as far as I am concerned, are vastly overruled by the above statements and facts.

I have done my utmost to avoid writing to Captain Ohmae. I did not wish him to feel that I was challenging his statements. I need his help, although I don't necessarily accept it. In my mind, a lot of the data, and notably some of these efforts to change the translations to suit a picture which he, at least, has already decided on was correct, leads me to believe that he is not entirely reliable. We have the same situation here with many of our top officers -- we ask them questions and they tell us things which they believe are so but which the facts show are not so.

With best regards, and with best wishes for a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

R. W. BATES

Mr. Roger Pineau,
Room 1218 (OpNav)
Main Navy
Navy Department
Washington 25, D.C.

0265